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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Member States, not alleged shortcomings of United Nations, are to blame for setbacks in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany tells General Assembly.

* China sets out guidelines for peace-keeping operations; says reform process must strengthen, not weaken, United Nations role in promoting development.

* France says it is completing nuclear test programme with view to signing test-ban treaty definitively; stresses its support for disarmament.

* Ireland urges establishment of permanent international criminal court, saying violations of humanitarian law threaten global peace and security.

* Mexico says its recent crisis revealed vulnerability of international financial system; countries undergoing structural change need support of IMF and World Bank.

* Foreign Ministers from several countries agree to pursue work to enhance United Nations rapid reaction capacity, Canada and Netherlands announce.

* United Nations condemns Bosnian Serb rocket attacks against four towns in Croatia, noting news of progress in New York peace talks.

* Donors meeting in Brussels pledge total of $993 million to consolidate peace process and assist development in Angola.

* United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator to undertake mission to Afghanistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1 to 18 October.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

* WFP warns food shortages are causing irreparable damage to entire generation of Iraqi children; doubles target beneficiary population to 2.15 million.

* Conference of Parties to Basel Convention adopts amendment banning exports of hazardous wastes from developed to developing countries.

* Legal Committee begins substantive work for fiftieth session by taking up UNCITRAL report.

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Disappointments and setbacks in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been unfairly attributed to the alleged inefficiency of the United Nations, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel told the General Assembly today. He said they were the result of unsatisfactory mandates, a lack of political will on the part of Member States, and a shortage of funds. "It is us, the Members, who cause the difficulties," he stressed. Germany was interested in permanent membership of the Security Council, and would assume greater responsibility as an extension of its commitment to the Organization.

The United Nations could not take on every responsibility, and must focus on what was feasible, Mr. Kinkel continued. The extent and duration of its commitments must be precise; political and military objectives must be clearly defined and mandates must be realistic and coherent. The Organization must act consistently and resolutely, so as not to repeat what had happened in Rwanda or in Zepa and Srebrenica. Cooperation with other organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), must be planned so as to assure speed and efficiency. Regional organizations must play a larger role, as not every problem should go straight to the United Nations.

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In an address to the Assembly today, China's Vice Premier and Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, offered a set of guidelines for United Nations peace-keeping operations. The purposes and principles of the Charter should be observed, in particular the principle of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in states' internal affairs, he said. Disputes should be settled through peaceful means instead of frequent mandatory actions. Double standards and the imposition of the views of one or a few countries on the Security Council should be avoided. Operations should obtain prior consent from the parties concerned, observe strict neutrality and not use force except in self-defence. The Organization should not try to exceed its capability and should never become a party to a conflict.

(more)

The United Nations should pay at least as much attention to development as to peace, he continued. It should play a more dynamic role in galvanizing economic growth in developing countries. Those countries were faced with formidable obstacles to raising the living standards of their people. More than one billion people were living in abject poverty, posing one of the most acute problems for the world community. United Nations reform must result in the strengthening, not the weakening, of the Organization's role in the area of development.

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French Foreign Minister Herve de Charette today said that his country had decided to complete the programme of nuclear tests temporarily suspended in 1992 so that it could sign the treaty banning nuclear tests definitively. In an address to the Assembly, he stressed that it was a final test series, limited to what was strictly necessary and held under conditions that had been proved to be harmless. He expressed strong support for disarmament, and called on all States to adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty without delay. For its part, France had reduced its nuclear warheads by 15 per cent between 1991 and 1995.

The Foreign Minister went on to say that the world needed the United Nations, citing the increasing number of tasks entrusted to it. However, the Organization was not shown sufficient respect, probably because of a lack of political will and resources. In Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, peace-keepers had found themselves in situations which the United Nations had accepted, but which would never have been accepted by a Member State. Meanwhile, the international community had impassively witnessed unacceptable suffering, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Those tragic events showed the danger of mixing humanitarian and military missions, and the risks posed when missions lacked clarity. The Organization needed to make itself respected when it intervened, he concluded.

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The United Nations has a remarkable record on which to build, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ireland, Dick Spring, told the Assembly today. It had enshrined the universal obligation of respect for law and good conduct between States as the centre-piece of international relations; it had reduced the danger of global confrontation during the cold war; it had provided an indispensable framework for crucial arms control agreements; it had facilitated decolonization and the dismantling of apartheid; it had restored stability to many parts of the world through its peace-keeping operations; it had set the basic international standards for human rights; and it had sustained efforts to eliminate poverty and improve the living standards of the world's most vulnerable people.

There was growing acceptance that violations of humanitarian law were a threat to international peace and security, he continued. The case for the establishment of a permanent international criminal court was therefore more obvious than ever. Only through such a body could the international community effectively demonstrate that massive human rights violations would never go unpunished. It was also necessary to devise measures to provide early warning of potential situations of human rights abuses.

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The Foreign Minister of Mexico, Angel Gurria, today told the Assembly that his country's recent financial crisis revealed the vulnerability of the international financial system as a whole. While the globalization of production, trade and finance undoubtedly stimulated economic development, it could also lead to situations which the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank could not effectively deal with. Structural changes in all countries, particularly the developing ones, called for a stable international financial system, the availability of timely and effective financial support from the Bretton Woods institutions, and the ability to detect and prevent crises.

Mexico had faced its crisis head-on, the Foreign Minister continued. With the support of the international community, it had established a strict economic programme with stringent but necessary adjustment measures. It had sought to mitigate the costs of that programme as far as possible, while constructing a new platform for sustained development. As a result, inflation and interest rates were declining, productivity was rising, and the balance of trade was now showing a surplus. Meanwhile, Mexico was continuing to search for new markets in order to diversify its trade.

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Ministers from several countries have agreed to pursue work to enhance the rapid reaction capacity of the United Nations. That development was announced today by the Foreign Ministers of Canada and the Netherlands, Andre Oullet and Hans van Mierlo, whose Governments had put forward proposals on the issue. They made the announcement following a meeting with the Foreign Ministers of Australia, Denmark, Jamaica, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Senegal and Ukraine, along with Under-Secretary-General Kofi Annan and several military advisers.

Mr. Oullet told correspondents that the idea was to reduce delays between Security Council decisions and deployment in the field. He said the Ministers had agreed to ask their respective United Nations ambassadors to pursue work on the issue and to expand support with a view to substantially enhancing the Organization's capacity to respond quickly to crisis situations. They were not advocating a United Nations army to fight wars, but units to serve in hot spots around the world to help parties make peace and keep peace. Mr. van Mierlo said

the next move would be to work with the Secretariat on identifying the steps needed to advance the process.

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The United Nations today confirmed that Bosnian Serb forces had launched cross-border rocket attacks against several towns in Croatia. Rockets landed in the towns of Kutina, Novska, Ivanic Grad and Pozega, causing extensive damage to property, several injuries and possibly one death. The United Nations condemned the attacks in the strongest possible terms, especially given that they had come amid news of progress in the peace talks in New York.

Meanwhile in Sector South, the Croatian authorities in Knin announced the arrest of 375 people in connection with the looting of homes. That figure included 260 civilians, 70 police and 35 soldiers.

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Donors meeting in Brussels have pledged $993 million to consolidate the peace process and promote development in Angola, exceeding a goal of $700 million, a United Nations spokesman announced today. He noted that many of the donors had linked their pledges to continued implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, and pointed out that pledges made did not always translate into funds disbursed.

The two-day meeting was organized by the Government of Angola, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and hosted by the European Union. A separate consultation was held today to address the enabling policy and regulatory environment that would stimulate private sector investment in Angola.

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In his capacity as United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, Under-Secretary-General Peter Hansen will undertake a mission to Afghanistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone from 1 to 18 October, a spokesman for the Organization said today. He will review the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and the emergency situations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, which have failed to draw an adequate international response.

The spokesman stressed that the three countries were in critical need of donor support. New inter-agency appeals would soon be issued for Afghanistan and Liberia. The situation was particularly bad in the African sub-region, with some 5 million people directly affected.

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Alarming food shortages are causing irreparable damage to an entire generation of Iraqi children, according to a senior official of the World Food Programme (WFP). Returning from an assessment mission in Iraq, WFP Chief Emergency Support Officer Dieter Hannusch said conditions there were as bad as anything he had seen in his 24 years of field work, most of which had been spent in Africa.

The Programme has decided to increase its target beneficiary population in Iraq from 1.02 million to 2.15 million. To keep those people alive next year, it will need more than 310,000 metric tons of food, at a cost of $123 million.

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The Third Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes has adopted an amendment to the Convention banning the export of hazardous wastes from developed countries to developing ones. The amendment bans waste exports destined for final disposal with immediate effect. A ban on exports destined for recovery or recycling will be phased in between now and 31 December 1997.

Developing countries lack the financial, technical, legal and institutional capacity for monitoring the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and preventing illegal imports. The amendment to the Convention will strengthen those countries' existing bans and discourage the generation of hazardous wastes at source.

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The Sixth Committee (Legal) has begun its substantive work for the fiftieth session by taking up the report of the United Nations Commission on International Law (UNCITRAL). Also before the Committee is the Secretary-General's report on the granting of travel of assistance to delegates to the Commission from developing countries.

UNCITRAL Chairman Goh Phai Cheng said the Commission was developing draft conventions and model laws to provide a legislative framework for rapid changes in global trade. For example, the draft model law on electronic data interchange (EDI) facilitated the use of electronic media, which were rapidly replacing paper in global business. In the future, UNCITRAL would concentrate on, among other things, build-operate-transfer (BOT) projects, which were used to mobilize private sector resources for infrastructure development.

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